

## More Than Like by JoMo3

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**Language:** English

**Characters:** Dustin Henderson, Eleven (Stranger Things), Jim "Chief" Hopper, Lucas Sinclair, Maxine "Max" Mayfield, Mike Wheeler, Will Byers

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**Summary:**

“What’s more than like?”

“What?”

“What’s better than like?” she repeated, finishing her breakfast.

“Love, I guess,” he answered, finishing his plate as well, and taking both plates to the sink. “Why?”

"Just asking."

or

Mike and El have the "I word" talk. Follows the events of "Time Together."

## More Than Like

The next morning was, to say the least, awkward.

Hopper woke up first and saw the two teens snuggled together. The fact that the rows of pillows he'd put between them were removed didn't bother him too much; he figured that would happen. What made him second guess this whole sleepover thing was that the two were cuddled up. Mike lay on his back, one hand over his head and under his pillow, the other at his side. El, meanwhile, was snuggled as close to Mike as she could be without being on top of him. Her head lay on her pillow, which was right next to Mike's head; her nose was burrowed into his shoulder. One arm was under her pillow, the other, her left, lay on Mike's chest.

Hopper cleared his throat, waking the two up. Mike's eyes got as wide as saucers when he saw Hopper standing above them; El didn't seem bothered, asking with a smile, "Eggo's?"

"Yeah, kid, we're gonna have Eggo's," Hopper said. "We're also going to have to have a talk about boundaries, I see. You two go get dressed," he said as he turned towards the kitchen. Then, realizing his phrasing, he called over his shoulder, "Separately!"

The group ate breakfast, Mike nervously and quietly eating while Eleven did most of the talking, discussing what they would do the next time Mike came over. When the group had finished their meal, Hopper told Mike to go get ready.

"He's mad," Mike muttered as he got his backpack from El's room.

El, who'd followed him, shook her head. "No. He yells when he's mad."

"He's mad at *me*," Mike answered. When Eleven looked confused, Mike explained, "He saw us...sleeping."

She still looked confused. "We were just sleeping."

"I know, but...I don't think he liked it."

Eleven shrugged her shoulders as if it were no big deal, and the two walked back to the main room where Hopper waited by the door. Glancing at Mike, he asked, "You ready?"

Mike nodded, and turned to El. "I'll call you tonight, okay?"

She nodded as well, right before she hugged him. Hugging her back, he said, "I had fun."

"Me too," she said as they pulled away.

And before Mike had a chance to respond, she put her lips on his, giving him a goodbye kiss. "Bye," she whispered.

"Bye," he whispered back, his neck going red.

The car ride back to the Wheelers' home was mostly quiet. Hopper played the radio and asked Mike about his parents. However, when they got to Mike's driveway, Hopper stopped him before he got out.

"If you come over again," Hopper said, "And right now that's a big *if*, I'd better not catch you two sleeping like that again. You understand?"

Mike gulped. "Yes, sir."

Hopper sighed, then nodded towards the house. "Go on, get out."

Mike snatched his backpack and climbed out of the car.

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The day after the sleepover, Eleven and Hopper were eating breakfast when she asked, "Why were you mad at Mike?"

Hopper, who'd been glancing at the paper, folded it. "Who says I was mad at Mike?"

“Mike,” she answered.

“Hmph. That kid’s smart, I’ll give him that,” Hopper said.

“And boundaries. You said we had to talk about those.”

“Yeah, they’re...” Hopper ran a hand through his hair. “Look, kid, you can’t be sleeping next to Mike like that. You’re just kids.”

“He’s my friend,” she answered matter-of-factly. “He’s my boyf..”

“Yeah, I know,” Hopper interrupted, not wanting to hear that word. “Boundaries means there’s certain things you can and cannot do. And *you* cannot sleep next to Mike.”

Eleven still didn’t see anything wrong, but she asked, “Is that why you were mad at Mike?”

“I wasn’t mad at Mike,” he admitted. “I just didn’t like what I saw.” He glanced at the clock and sighed. Standing, he added, “Look, Mike’s a good kid. I just don’t want you two to do something stupid.”

She shook her head. “Not stupid.”

“Yeah, I know.” He kissed the top of her head. “Gotta go.”

Two weeks went by. Eleven and Mike still communicated a few times a week on the radio, but for both of them it wasn’t nearly as good as when they were together in person.

El took great joy in the fact that she had a special name for Mike: boyfriend. She would whisper it to herself sometimes when she was alone in the cabin, and it always brought a smile to her face.

She regularly asked Hopper when Mike could come over again, but he would almost always answer with “I’ll think about it” which, to El, became as annoying as “soon.”

Although she now had an answer for what her relationship with Mike was called, she still didn’t have a word to describe the fluttery feeling

she got when she thought of, or was with him. She knew she *liked* Mike, but that didn't seem strong enough of a word. Was there something better than like?

She didn't feel comfortable asking Hopper about it, and she didn't know how to describe it to Mike. This was another one of those times when the confines of the cabin really affected her. She needed someone else to talk to, but she didn't have anyone. It was things like this that made her feel totally and utterly alone.

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After surviving his encounter with Hopper, Mike couldn't have been happier. It didn't take his friends long to figure out why.

The party (including Max) were in Mike's basement three days after the sleepover, working on homework Mr. Clarke had assigned. Lucas, Dustin, and Will had been asking Mike to tell what had happened at the sleepover, but Mike, wanting to keep some things private, simply told them they'd played games and watched movies.

An hour or so into working on their homework, the walkie that sat in the basement fort crackled, and they heard El's voice, asking, "Mike?"

Dustin, who was close to the fort, started to get up to answer, but Mike rushed over and snatched the walkie. "El?" he asked.

"Hi," she said, and he could tell she was smiling, which got him smiling as well.

"Hi, um could...."

"Hi, El!" Dustin called.

"Hi!" Will, and Lucas called as well. Max stayed quiet.

Mike shot them a look that said *shut up!* and then turned back to the walkie. "Hey, El, I'm studying right now with Lucas, Will, Dustin, and Max. Can I call you back in a little bit?"

He detected disappointment in her voice as she responded, "Okay. Bye, Mike."

Letting out a sigh, Mike put the walkie down and went back to his homework, his friend's eyes trailing him.

"What was that about?" Lucas asked.

"What was what about?" Mike asked as he sat down.

"You didn't think we wanted to talk to El?" Dustin piped in.

"Oh," Mike said. "I didn't think about that."

"You can't keep your girlfriend all to yourself," Max said. Mike immediately looked down at his book as his cheeks lit up. His friends noticed.

"You didn't!" Lucas exclaimed, jumping from his seat.

"What?" Will asked.

"You asked her, didn't you?" Lucas asked Mike. Mike shyly nodded, his head still down.

"Pay up, Dustin!" Lucas said, turning to Dustin. Dustin huffed, and took out a ten dollar bill from his pocket and gave it to Lucas.

"What's that about?" Max asked.

"I bet Dustin ten dollars that Mike 'popped the question' at the sleepover," Lucas explained.

"Wait, she wasn't already your girlfriend?" Max asked Mike.

"No, Mike's too much of a chicken to..." Dustin began.

"I barely see her, Dustin, so I never really had a chance," Mike said, raising his head. "It's no big deal. Lucas and Max are boyfriend and girlfriend, so..."

Max blushed as she cast a glance at Lucas. The two hadn't officially labeled their relationship.

"But yeah, El's my...she's my girlfriend," Mike said with a smile, liking the way it sounded out loud.

The homework was soon forgotten, as Mike finally indulged some of the things that had happened with Eleven at the sleepover. He left out them sleeping together, wanting to keep *something* to himself.

When his friends left, Mike called El back on the walkie; she picked up right away.

"I'm sorry about that," he explained.

"Sorry?"

"That I couldn't talk. We were studying. And I'm sorry if you wanted to talk to everyone else, I didn't think about that."

"It's okay," she said. "I wanted to talk to you."

Mike blushed.

And so it went for the next two weeks; the two of them talking through the walkies a few times a week, but it wasn't nearly as satisfying as Mike hoped. Now that she was officially his girlfriend, he wanted to actually, you know, *spend time* with her. And gnawing at the back of his mind was that he wanted to tell her how he felt about her:

He loved her.

And yes, he knew that he was only thirteen, but it didn't matter to him. He knew he loved her, and that he was *in love* with her. Every so often on one of their talks, he started to say something about it, but either he chickened out or he didn't feel right saying it over the walkie.

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Of course, he didn't know that Eleven was having similar thoughts, just unable to articulate them. Towards the end of January, she finally got a word for those feelings.

She and Hopper were sitting at breakfast when she decided to just ask.

"What's more than like?"

"What?"

"What's better than like?" she repeated, finishing her breakfast.

"Love, I guess," he answered, finishing his plate as well, and taking both plates to the sink. "Why?"

"Love is really good?"

"It's a lot more than like." Something dawned on him. "Oh, no, you're not talking about Mi..."

"Just asking," she said, getting up and going to watch TV.

Hopper huffed, but left her alone.

Eleven was happy now, knowing that there was a word for more than like. But this word, *love*, was that what made her heart beat faster when she thought of Mike? Did he feel the same way? How do you *love* something?

She wanted to ask Hopper for clarification, but the way he reacted when he realized it was Mike she was talking about made her not want to bring it up again.

What she did know was that she wanted to see him again. And, after more pleading, begging, and compromising with Hopper, he agreed to let Mike come over the first Saturday of February.

It wasn't a sleepover, but Hopper had agreed that Mike could spend most of the day at the cabin. Hopper arrived at the Wheeler house



early, and rolled his eyes when he caught a glimpse of Mike Wheeler as he walked out of his house.

It wasn't what he was wearing; just a normal sweater and jeans. It was the fact he was holding a bouquet of roses and a card, no doubt due to the upcoming holiday.

"Oh, Jesus," Hopper said under his breath as Mike got into the truck.

"What?" Mike asked.

"Nothing." Hopper backed up into the street and headed down the road. Shaking his head, he said "Don't expect her to have gotten you anything."

"Oh. Well, I didn't really expect her to," Mike said, shrugging.

By ten thirty they arrived at the cabin. They did the usual trek through the woods and over the tripwire. Mike felt the familiar butterflies in his stomach as they climbed the steps. Hopper did the knock, and they went inside. El had been sitting on the couch, but she jumped up in excitement when she saw the two enter, quickly embracing Mike.

"Missed you," she whispered into his shoulder.

"I missed you, too," he whispered back.

As they pulled apart, she noticed the things in his hands. "What are these?" she asked.

"Um...well..." Mike began, not really wanting to do this with Hopper present.

Hopper seemed to take the hint, and said "Why don't you two go to your room, El, and he'll explain it to you. Door open."

"Not stupid," she said back, taking Mike's hand.

So, hand in hand, Eleven led Mike to her room. Mike sat in the chair Hopper sat in when he read to her, while El sat on her bed.

“Um,” Mike said, looking at his feet, then back at El, “The flowers are because...well..it’s Valentine’s Day pretty soon.”

“Valentine’s Day?” she asked.

“Yeah, it’s...it’s a holiday.”

“Like Christmas?” she asked excitedly. Christmas had been a fun time for her. She hadn’t got to spend it with the boys, but Hopper had gotten a small tree and she’d received a few small gifts.

“Kind of. It’s more for people who...people who like each other. Boys sometimes get gifts for their girlfriends, so...” He held up the red flowers. “These are for you.”

Her eyes widened as she took them from his hand. She gave them a sniff, and slowly turned them in her hands. “Pretty.”

“And this too,” Mike said, giving her the card. She opened it and smiled when she saw the cartoon dog inside. After reading it, she looked up at him with a lovesick smile on her face. “Thank you.” Then she realized something. “I don’t have a gift for you.”

“It’s okay, El,” he told her. “You didn’t know about it.”

She nodded, but still seemed unhappy.

There was a sudden knock at the door, and Hopper stood there, not looking too happy. “Look,” he said, “I got a call, I need to go in for a little bit. Can I trust you two to behave yourselves while I’m gone?”

“Yes,” El answered.

“Yes, sir,” Mike responded.

“Alright, then,” Hopper said. To El, he said, “Remember the rules.”

“I brought another movie,” Mike said as the front door closed. Unzipping his backpack, he said “It’s called Time Bandits. Do you want to watch it?”

The two went and settled on the couch as they watched the movie.

Mike kept looking to El to see if she was enjoying the it, but her mind appeared to be somewhere else. About halfway through, he paused it. She turned to look at him.

“Mike?”

“What’s wrong, El?”

Looking at her lap, she said, “I didn’t get you anything for Valentine’s Day.”

Mike chuckled. “It’s okay. I’m not upset. Just...getting to see you is all I wanted.”

“Me, too,” she said, feeling that flutter again. The two leaned close and shared a quick kiss.

Pulling apart, they locked eyes for a moment before El asked, “Mike, what is love?”

Mike immediately felt his cheeks flush. “Uh...why?”

Seeing his reaction, she looked back at her lap. “Nevermind.”

“No, El, it’s..” he took her hand. “It’s just...hard to describe, that’s all.”

“What do you think it is?” she asked.

Sighing, he answered, “Well, one kind is when you really like someone. When you like someone so much that it turns into love,” he said, trying to describe the feelings he had for her. “It’s like...a feeling you get.”

“What does it feel like?”

“Um...” he thought about how he felt when thinking of her or being with her. “You feel happier when you’re around them, and you care about them alot, and want them to be happy. And when you aren’t around them, you feel kind of, I don’t know...empty.”

“Oh,” she said, taking it all in.

“But when you are around them, there’s no place you’d rather be. A lot of times you get a weird, but good, feeling in your stomach, like you’re nervous and excited at the same time.”

“Do you love friends?”

“Yeah, you can. That’s another kind of love. That’s kind of like the love you have for your family.”

“Oh,” she repeated, nodding her head. Looking at him, she asked, “Do you love me?”

Again, Mike felt his cheeks get hot, but he powered through it. “Yes,” he said, and it felt as if a weight had been lifted.

“Like a friend?”

He smiled. “No. Not like a friend.”

She returned the smile. “I love you, too.”

“Like a friend?”

She shook her head.

Mike scooted closer and they kissed again, this one just a little longer than before. Eleven then rested her head on Mike’s shoulder as he wrapped an arm around her.

She felt the fluttery, sparkly feeling again as she lay against Mike, and welcomed it, knowing the name of it now, *love* .

Mike felt a similar feeling as the two continued the movie, and he couldn’t help but smile.

They both knew their time together was limited for the time being, but it didn’t bother them as much today, having both been able to express their feelings for one another. They knew that it was something that would last forever.

**Author's Note:**

Once again, I'm considering continuing this (where El gets a gift for Mike), but we'll see.

Thanks for reading. I like comments if you'd like to leave them.